

aggressive schedule for completing this process, we believe it will require several years before bearing fruit.

Mr. Speaker, some VA hospitals, health care and research facilities need additional maintenance, repair and improvements to address immediate dangers and hazards, to promote safety and to sustain a reasonable standard of care for our Nation's veterans. In addition to reports from outside consultants and VA about the serious risk of seismic damage, VA has also identified \$57 million in improvements needed to address women's health care; another report concluded that VA should be spending (at a minimum) from 2 percent to 4 percent of its "plant replacement value" on upkeep and replacement of its health care facilities. This value in VA is at least \$35 billion; thus, VA should be spending from \$700 million to \$1.4 billion each year to keep pace with its capital needs. In fact, in fiscal year 2003, VA will spend \$137 million for these purposes.

While Congress authorized a number of major VA medical construction projects over the past three fiscal years, very few have received funding through the appropriations process. I understand that some of the more recent deferrals of major VA construction were intended to permit CARES to proceed in an orderly way, avoiding unnecessary spending on VA health care facilities that might not be needed by veterans in the future. I agree with this policy in general, especially for those larger facility projects, ones that ordinarily would be considered under our regular annual construction authorization measure. We need to resist wasteful spending, especially when overall funds are so precious. But I believe that I have a better plan.

Mr. Speaker, when I assumed the Chairmanship of the Veterans' Subcommittee on Health earlier this year, I asked what steps my colleagues and I might take immediately that could help veterans. The legislation that I am introducing today is part of this answer. This bill sets up a three-year program of delegated authorizations that would update, improve, establish, restore or replace VA health care facilities where needed. The Secretary would be given this authority to approve the individual facility projects, based on recommendations of an independent capital investments board and on criteria detailed in our bill that place a premium on projects to protect patient safety and privacy, improve seismic protection, provide barrier-free accommodations, and improve VA patient care facilities in several specialized areas of concern, such as privacy needs, specialized care programs and other high priorities of Congress, in order to meet the contemporary standard of care our veterans deserve and need.

The bill would require the Secretary at the end of the process to report his actions to this Committee and to the Committee on Appropriations as well. The bill would also mandate a review of this delegated-project approach by the General Accounting Office, to ensure this is an effective mechanism to advance some VA medical construction during and after the CARES process.

Mr. Speaker, our bill would authorize appropriations of \$500 million in fiscal year 2004, \$600 million in fiscal year 2005, and \$700 million in fiscal year 2006, to accommodate construction projects under the authority provided. The total amount authorized matches that rec-

ommended by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs to the Committee on the Budget earlier this year in our views and estimates for fiscal year 2004. I believe we can make the case for this approach by doing something urgently needed by veterans, in the best traditions of our commitment to them, while staying consistent with the intent of the CARES process. I want our work to assure all our veterans, that in as many situations as possible, their health care and research facilities, and the critical maintenance and repair needs of these facilities, will not go unnoticed and unfunded by this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I trust that my colleagues will agree with me that this is a worthy bill. Last year, VA quickly identified 20 projects that would be appropriate for consideration under terms much like those contained in this bill. I am certain that in all sectors of the VA health care system there are more meritorious projects that need funding, and enactment of this bill would give the Secretary an opportunity to identify, consider, approve and develop them appropriately, with the authority and funds to do so. Many VA facilities need funds right now, on an emergency basis, for major construction and repair projects; other facilities have more chronic needs for restoration and capital improvements that have lingered unfunded for years. New VA health care and research facilities are also needed. In my judgment, we cannot afford to wait several years before beginning to meet these needs, when these projects confront the VA system, veterans, and Congress today.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support this bill and help enact it as a high priority early this year.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LUIS V. GUTIERREZ

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. GUTIERREZ. Mr. Speaker, I was absent from this chamber on January 27, 2003 and missed voting on rollcall vote Nos. 13 and 14. I want the RECORD to show that had I been present in this chamber, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote Nos. 13 and 14. Also, I was briefly absent from this chamber on January 28, 2003 and I would like the RECORD to show that had I been present in this chamber, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote No. 15. Also, I was absent from this chamber on February 25, 2003 and I would like the RECORD to show that had I been present in this chamber, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote Nos. 33 and 34. I was also absent from this chamber on March 4, 2003 and I would like the RECORD to show that had I been present in this chamber, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote Nos. 40, 41 and 42.

On March 18, 2003 I was absent from this chamber and I would like the RECORD to show that had I been present in this chamber, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote Nos. 65, 66 and 67. On April 3, 2003 I was briefly absent from this chamber and I would like the RECORD to show that had I been present in this chamber, I would have voted "no" on rollcall vote No. 105. On April 7, 2003 I was absent from this chamber and missed voting on

rollcall vote Nos. 109, 110 and 111. I want the RECORD to show that had I been present in this chamber, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote Nos. 109, 110 and 111.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SPOKANE TRIBE OF INDIANS SETTLEMENT ACT

HON. GEORGE R. NETHERCUTT, JR.

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. NETHERCUTT. Mr. Speaker, I am honored today to introduce legislation with my colleague from Washington [Mr. DICKS] that will provide an equitable settlement of the meritorious claims of the Spokane Tribe of Indians concerning its contribution to the production of hydropower by the Grand Coulee Dam.

Similar settlement legislation was enacted in 1994 to compensate the neighboring Confederated Colville Tribes as a consequence of the Grand Coulee Dam. That legislation, P.L. 103-436, provided for a \$53 million lump sum payment for past damages and roughly \$15 million annually from the ongoing proceeds from the sale of hydropower by the Bonneville Power Administration. The Spokane settlement legislation, which I am introducing today, would provide a settlement of the Spokane Tribe of Indians claims directly proportional to the settlement afforded the Colville Tribes based upon the percentage of lands appropriated from the respective tribes for the Grand Coulee Project, or approximately 39.4 percent of the past and future compensation awarded the Colville Tribes pursuant to the 1994 legislation. Though the proposed Spokane settlement is proportionately less, the losses sustained by the Spokane Tribe are substantially the same as those sustained by the Colville Tribes and arise from the same actions of the United States Government. The difference being that the Spokane Tribe lost its entire salmon fishery, the base of its economy.

Grand Coulee Dam is the largest concrete dam in the world, the largest electricity producer in the United States, and the third largest electricity producer in the world. It produces four times more electricity than Hoover Dam on the Colorado River and is three times its size. Grand Coulee is one mile in width; its spillway is twice the height of Niagara Falls. It provides electricity and water to one of the world's largest irrigation projects, the one million acre Columbia Basin Project. The Grand Coulee Project is the backbone of the Northwest's federal power grid and agricultural economy.

For more than half a century, the Grand Coulee Project has produced enormous revenues for the United States Government and brought prosperity to the Pacific Northwest. The construction of the dam and the electricity it produced, helped pull the Northwest out of the Great Depression. It provided electricity to the aluminum plants that built the air force that helped to defeat Germany and Japan in World War II.

To the Spokane Tribe of Indians, however, the dam is a monument to the destruction of their way of life. The Dam flooded their reservation on two sides. The Spokane River—the ancestral umbilical cord to Spokane existence and the heart of their reservation—was changed from a free flowing waterway that